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ABSTRACT

Living in a world-class society with information-age technology challenges American educators to improve their communication and collaboration skills. Recent discussions concerning the school counselor's role in education emphasized the need to achieve a clearer understanding of this role in educational reform, and a desire to improve counselor communication and collaboration within the school and in the community. Effective collaboration is built on the strong personal characteristics of the collaborator, a clearly defined system, and administrative support for change within the organization. Organizations which encourage collaboration will demonstrate evidence of: shared decision-making; the encouragement of multi-disciplinary efforts; leaders ready to restructure for change; and other features. Collaboration yields many benefits, including reduced competition for diminishing resources, elimination of service duplication, and diversified problem-solving. With stiffer competition and growing student needs, the only way to keep up with the diminishing resources and increasing demands is to collaborate with other educators in comprehensive health reform, to develop an integrated services model at the local school site, and to reach out into the community with school-to-work transitions linkages with business and industry. School counselors now have a chance to become proactively involved in the education reform taking place across the United States. (RJM)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS COLLABORATING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Jackie M. Allen

Living and working in a world class society with information age technology at their finger tips all educators are challenged to improve their communication and collaboration skills. Current trends and issues in education, and specifically in school counseling, indicate the importance of collaborating for student success.

The Issues

A diminishing economic base in education, coupled with increased societal problems reflected in student needs and an era of educational reform, have challenged school counselors to maximize their effectiveness through improved counseling and guidance programs. In May of 1993 the American Counseling Association (ACA) with a grant from the ACA Counseling and Human Development Foundation sponsored an invitational Think Tank on the Crisis in School Counseling. Representatives from ACA divisions, regions, committees, and affiliates came together dedicated to exploring and defining the needs of school counseling and the roles of the school counselors in educational reform. From the discussion during the Think Tank it was evident that primary concerns included achieving a clearer understanding of the school counselor's role in reform initiatives and improving counselor communication and collaboration within the school and in the community. Inter-association and/or interagency dialogue and collaboration were also stressed as components of an effective comprehensive developmental counseling and guidance program.

ASCA Presidential Theme Digest

From a business and industry perspective Total Quality Management principles are being applied to educational reform. The concept of inclusion of all major publics in school improvement planning has led to the development of strong linkages between internal and external stakeholders. Support networks at the regional and local levels are being formed to foster system improvement and facilitate optimum student learning.

Many educators believe that the school should be a community of both adult and more youthful learners. An essential ingredient in the development of such a community is the quality of interpersonal relationships. Those relationships need to be collegial, cooperative, and interdependent. School improvement requires efforts both from within and from outside the school in order to develop a community of learners. Collaboration for student success is an integral part of educational reform.

School counselors have often been perceived as being apart from, or separate from, the mainstream of education. Over the last 15 years well known national education reports, such as *A Nation At Risk*, have had a conspicuous absence of references to school counseling. In the current educational reform literature a specific role for the school counselor has not yet been defined. School counselors themselves must define their part in educational reform.

Characteristics of Collaboration

Collaboration is the process whereby two individuals or groups work together for a common goal, a mutual benefit, or a desired outcome. Trust, respect, openness, active listening, clear communication, and risk taking are fundamental requirements for collaborative efforts. In order for collaboration to happen participants must share a common vision and agree on a common mission. The motivation for a common mission may be the need to identify or solve a problem, to focus on the issues, or to achieve consensus. Initiating and maintaining collaborative efforts is an appropriate role of the school counselor in educational reform.

Requirements For Effective Collaboration

Many barriers prevent educators from establishing and maintaining collaborative efforts. Effective collaboration is built on the strong personal characteristics of the collaborator, a clearly defined system, and administrative support for a change within the organization. Personal requirements needed to foster collaborative relationships include risk-taking, an ability to work well in a group process interaction, a cooperative leadership style, conflict resolution skills, knowledge of agency structure and terminology, an ability to develop rapport with collaborators, and flexibility in adjusting to change. An unencumbered system has clear lines of authority, flexibility in the allocation of funds, clear mandates, and distinct policies and procedures which will facilitate collaborative efforts.

An organizational structure which encourages collaborative efforts will demonstrate evidence of: administrative support for shared-decision-making; an organizational philosophy which encourages integrated or multi-disciplinary efforts; leaders ready to restructure with enthusiasm for change; recognition of the interdependence of organizations in society; a past history which

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is collegial; availability of financial support and time for skill training; and opportunities to develop collaborative efforts.

Benefits of Collaboration

There are numerous benefits to be gained by collaboration. School counselors will gain increased visibility and viability by involvement in collaborative programs. Collaborative efforts reduce competition for diminishing resources, eliminate duplication of services, and provide a diversified approach to solving the problems and providing the services needed by students. Most grants for educational purposes require collaborative efforts, a history of collaboration, and the demonstration of cost effective methods for accomplishing goals. Acquiring additional funds for a special project or expansion of services may necessitate the pooling of resources through a collaborative grant.

Integrated services models, in which several providers such as school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers work together, as in the Education Development Center project on "Integrating Pupil Services Personnel into Comprehensive School Health and HIV Prevention" enhance the possibility for student success. In working with the "whole" student through a comprehensive developmental counseling and guidance program it makes sense for the school counselor to coordinate the delivery of school-linked and community-linked services. The school counselor is the site-based professional best positioned and trained to coordinate comprehensive health and career programs for students. Collaborative efforts provide a diversity in services and approaches, a cost effective method of program and service delivery, an integrated approach to the "whole" student in the community of learners, enhanced expertise from a varied bank of resources, and improved programs and services.

The Collaborative Role of the School Counselor in Educational Reform

In defining the role of the school counselor in educational reform, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) has provided bold and visionary leadership through the development of a pamphlet on "The Professional School Counselor's Role in Educational Reform". During the 1994 National School Counseling Week an ASCA Summit was held in Washington, D.C. During the Summit significant collaborative efforts were initiated with a number of agencies and associations in government, education and business. At that time ASCA proactively announced the school counselor's role as facilitator and change agent in the local school community. Collaborating with the Goals 2000 Panel, ASCA is working to make that change agent role known across the country. It is now the responsibility of each school counselor to adopt the Summit model, implement their role, and begin collaborative efforts in their local school.

A paradigm shift is needed in both school counselor role and school counselor function. To demonstrate their role change, school counselors must move out of the counseling offices into the community. The school counselor is the most appropriate educator to facilitate "a culture of collaboration" in the local school community. As a human relations specialist, a facilitator of team building, a resource broker of services, an information processor, and a promoter of positive student outcomes the school counselor as change agent develops and nurtures collaborative relationships by facilitating change through programs of prevention and intervention for all students. Developing a culture of collaboration at the local school will unite students, faculty, staff, and the community in a common vision and mission to prepare each student to be successful in school and to acquire the essential skills for successful employment, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning.

Other Collaborative Efforts

Many opportunities are available for school counselors to collaborate for student success. Collaborative efforts may begin at the local school site as school counselors work with teachers, administrators, and other health care professionals. Partnerships with business and industry for school-to-work transition programs are developing. School-based and school-linked integrated services models are growing. Local civic groups seek collaborations with effective education programs that make a difference. State and federal agencies and private philanthropic organizations provide opportunities for collaborative efforts. The initiative and imagination of the individual school counselor will determine the extent and variety of collaborative efforts that can be developed in the local school community.

Conclusion

With decreasing funds, stiffer competition, and growing student needs, the only way to keep up with the diminishing resources and the increasing demands is to collaborate with other educators in comprehensive health reform, to develop an integrated services model at the local school site, and to reach out into the community with school-to-work transition linkages to business and industry. School counselors have a window of opportunity open to them to become proactively involved in the education reform and restructuring activities which are taking place across the country. Collaborative efforts when properly initiated and carefully nurtured will improve school counseling programs and promote student success.

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